

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

# RETURNING TO AN APOLITICAL OFFICER CORPS

*by*

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## Contents

Certificate.....	i
Contents.....	ii
Biography.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Scholarship on American Civil-Military Relations.....	2
Civil-Military Relations Since Vietnam.....	6
The Marshall Model.....	13
Conclusion.....	18
Bibliography.....	20

## **Biography**

Lieutenant Colonel Daniel B. Talati is currently a student at the Air War College for AY 2009-2010. Previously, he served as commander of the 661st Aeronautical Systems Squadron in Waco, Texas and Denver, Colorado. Col Talati is a 1991 graduate of Purdue University and was commissioned via the AFROTC program. He attended Undergraduate Navigator Training at Mather AFB, California and was subsequently assigned to the RC-135S Cobra Ball reconnaissance aircraft at Offutt AFB, Nebraska, later serving as the fleet's project engineer in Air Force Material Command. Col Talati graduated from the Naval Command and Staff College in 2005; his staff tours include assignments as a Program Element Monitor in the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition and on the Commander's Action Group at Headquarters Pacific Air Forces.

## Introduction

*I, [name] having been appointed a (rank) in the United States (branch of service), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.<sup>1</sup>*

This is the oath that every United States military officer takes upon their commissioning. After that commissioning, these officers are tasked to operate in some of the most complex, ambiguous environments mankind faces, but, at the most fundamental level, these men and women are simply empowered by the American people to defend the American Constitution. Of all the challenges these officers face, the relationship between their military institution and its civilian masters is often the most daunting. At its core, this civil-military relationship is defined by a paradox: how does a society reconcile building a military strong enough to do anything elected leaders ask, but ensuring it remains compliant enough to do *only* what they ask?<sup>2</sup>

The simple answer is that this balance is maintained by a self-regulating, professional officer corps subordinated to the country's civilian leadership and trusted by the general public. This professionalism and trust, though deeply rooted, must not be taken for granted. This essay

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(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

<sup>1</sup> AF Mentor Web site.

<sup>2</sup> Feaver, "Civil-Military Problematique," 149.

will examine a growing threat to civil-military relations in the United States—the increasing political partisanship of officers. Specifically, there is rising evidence of the American military officer corps evolving into a politically homogenous organization. Regardless of the actual extent of this problem, even a *perception* of institutional political leanings or partisan affiliation is extremely problematic to civil-military relations.

This essay will focus on the specific dangers of today's military officers' growing identification with the Republican Party and will propose a renewed emphasis on an apolitical officer corps using General George C. Marshall as a timeless model. It will begin with a brief overview of classic civil-military relations theory beginning with the work of Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz followed by a discussion of arguments advanced by some of their academic disciples. It will then examine the origin and background of the partisan officer corps and describe some relevant political issues that loom on the horizon. Finally, this essay will argue for a new norm utilizing the example of General Marshall's leadership before and during World War II. His insistence on operating apolitically, even at the highest levels of civil-military interaction, provides today's officer corps and senior leadership with a timeless model to emulate. In the end, trusting, healthy civil-military interaction is fundamental to the formulation and execution of effective US national security policy, and any threats to that core relationship warrant aggressive correction.

## **Scholarship on American Civil-Military Relations**

Any study of civil-military relations must begin with a brief examination of Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz—the benchmark theorists that have framed the discussion for the past half century. Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* (1957) and Janowitz's *The*

*Professional Soldier* (1960), both classic works, addressed the dangers of an ideological divide, or “gap,” between the military and the civilians it serves.

Samuel Huntington, a political scientist, explained the gap by the inherent nature of a conservative officer corps and a liberal, individualistic society. First, it is important to briefly clarify Huntington’s definitions of “conservative” and “liberal,” as they differ from today’s common understandings. At the heart of Huntington’s definition of liberalism is individualism and the opposition to any restraints on individual liberty. Liberals believe that people are essentially “good” and that humans should use reason to achieve progress, peace, and harmony. Conservatism, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of institutions and power in human relations. It has a less optimistic view of human nature and sees conflict as inevitable. Huntington highlights that the ideology of conservatism very closely aligns with the military ethic—the natural makeup of military officers.<sup>3</sup>

Huntington further argued that the civilian-military ideological gap would vary based on the external threats to the nation—a greater threat would equate to a smaller gap because the military would necessarily be larger and therefore more representative of society. Huntington urged civilian leaders to tolerate, even appreciate, the conservative military culture—as attempting to change it would prove disastrous.<sup>4</sup> He writes, “The requisite for military security is a shift in basic American values from liberalism to conservatism. Only an environment which is sympathetically conservative will permit American military leaders to combine the political power which society thrusts upon them with the military professionalism without which society

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<sup>3</sup> Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 90-94.

<sup>4</sup> Feaver, Kohn, and Cohn, “Gap Between Military and Civilian,” 2.



cannot endure.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, Huntington implied that the ideological rift is essentially a civilian problem and that if society cannot or will not embrace conservative values, then the military should be left alone in its conservatism—that it should stand apart from society.<sup>6</sup>

Morris Janowitz, a sociologist, disagreed with Huntington. He contended that that ideological rift between the military and civilian realms must be managed by the military as they adjust to the needs of the civilian authorities.<sup>7</sup> He argued for a politically savvy officer corps operating comfortably as statesmen as well as warriors.<sup>8</sup> Janowitz, unlike Huntington, felt officers could not be kept out of politics with a clear division of labor.<sup>9</sup> He warned, however, “The transformation of political beliefs from implicit commitments and loyalties to a more explicit ideology relates directly to the strain on military honor.”<sup>10</sup> During the 1950s, Janowitz’s concerns were not realized. Indeed, his research showed that most officers were conservative, but not aligned with any political party.<sup>11</sup>

Together, Huntington and Janowitz defined the 20<sup>th</sup> century civil-military playing field. Huntington implored civilians not to attack the conservative military culture, while Janowitz lamented the consequences of a conservative military drifting too far from civilian society. Next, we must determine if the ideological differences that Huntington advocated and Janowitz feared have evolved into a much more dangerous partisan military institution.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 463-464.

<sup>6</sup> Mastroianni and Scott, “After Iraq: The Politics of Blame,” 54.

<sup>7</sup> Feaver, Kohn, and Cohn, “Gap Between Military and Civilian,” 3.

<sup>8</sup> Mastroianni and Scott, “After Iraq: The Politics of Blame,” 54.

<sup>9</sup> Feaver, “Civil-Military Problematique,” 164.

<sup>10</sup> Janowitz, *Professional Soldier*, 235.

<sup>11</sup> Ulrich, “Infusing Civil-Military Relations Norms,” 350.

<sup>12</sup> Mastroianni and Scott, “After Iraq: The Politics of Blame,” 54.

With the end of the Cold War, the Huntington-Janowitz debate attracted renewed interest, and intellectual disciples of these two scholars began to define their positions. In the 1990s, followers of Huntington argued that a deteriorating civilian culture had drifted too far from traditional values and threatened to harm healthy civil-military relations. They claimed the “governing elite” was hostile to the military, attacking its warrior traditions and ethos. They further felt the military was so grounded in subordination that it could allow military effectiveness to wane.<sup>13</sup> Janowitz followers, on the other hand, felt that the all-volunteer military was drifting further from society, becoming disproportionately “right-wing” and associated with the Republican Party. Both camps were adamant in their claims, but neither was backed by much evidence. In 2001, the need for more data led Peter Feaver and Richard Kohn to organize “Project on the Gap Between the Military and Civilian Society” sponsored by the Triangle Institute for Strategic Studies. Feaver and Kohn developed a 250-question survey, which they administered to nearly 5,000 individuals in three categories: civilian leaders, military officers, and the general public.<sup>14</sup>

Not surprisingly, the study found the officer corps to be more conservative than civilians, but, strikingly, eight times as many military officers identified themselves as Republicans as Democrats, with Independents making up only 27 percent. Other interesting findings included military officers expressing great pessimism about the moral health of society, as well as reluctance to accept a fundamental tenet of civilian control—that elected leaders have a right to be wrong. Military officers felt that it was their role to insist rather than advise or advocate in

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<sup>13</sup> Sam Sarkesian makes this argument in his 1998 *Orbis* article, “The U.S. Military Must Find Its Voice.” In the context of Bosnian peacekeeping operations, Sarkesian contended that high-ranking officers should have expressed concerns about problems with “nontraditional” missions rather than simply being paralyzed by a “can do” posture.

<sup>14</sup> Feaver, Kohn, and Cohn, “Gap Between Military and Civilian,” 4-8.

private on key decisions regarding the use of force.<sup>15</sup> The data did not eliminate the Huntington-Janowitz debate, but it largely confirmed what many had suspected—the gap was widening and evolving. No longer was the officer corps simply more conservative than the rest of society—it was increasingly and disproportionately aligned with the Republican Party. But why? A quick look at the past 50 years provides some explanation.

### **Civil-Military Relations since Vietnam**

Few events transformed American institutions like the Vietnam War, and civil-military relations were no exception. President Lyndon Johnson and his inherited Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, had a disastrous relationship with the armed forces. Johnson made no secret of his disdain for military and showed it by ignoring the Joint Chiefs and failing to provide them clear guidance. Even worse, McNamara misled and lied to them. The military saw itself taking blame for poor results while being afforded little or no input.<sup>16</sup>

None of this should have been surprising. Johnson's presidential focus was an ambitious, liberal-Democratic domestic agenda. His goal for Vietnam was limiting its scope to ensure it did not interfere with the attention or resources needed for his "Great Society" legislation. Occupied with domestic issues, Johnson left Vietnam to McNamara. In turn, the Secretary of Defense imposed a top-down strategy: a graduated response monitored by meticulous and obsessive mathematical measures of success (i.e. body counts). Adamantly opposed to McNamara's strategy and still reeling from a "limited war" strategy in Korea, military leadership favored

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<sup>15</sup> Feaver and Kohn, "Conclusion: The Gap and What It Means," 460-465.

<sup>16</sup> Herspring, *Pentagon and the Presidency*, 150.

either a full-up effort or complete withdrawal. Neither of these, however, was reconcilable with Johnson's political agenda, and discontent grew.<sup>17</sup>

Exacerbating the situation was Johnson's desire to minimize the public's increasing concern with Vietnam by concealing the military's growing overseas commitment. One method of concealment was his decision to not call up the reserve forces. In addition, McNamara further marginalized the Joint Chiefs by excluding them to participate in higher-level discussions of strategy or policy.<sup>18</sup> The Chiefs responded with disgust bordering on insubordination.<sup>19</sup> Civil-military relations had bottomed-out.

The military grew convinced that it was trapped in an unwinnable situation because of civilian incompetence. Johnson, and his predecessor Kennedy, both Democrats, were perceived as unwilling to expend the resources necessary for an absolute victory the likes of World War II. As a whole, the military emerged from Vietnam determined never again to fall victim to unclear objectives, unsatisfactory means, or an unsupportive American public.<sup>20</sup> Military officers felt they were let down, or worse, "stabbed in the back," by both civilian leadership and the American people.<sup>21</sup> They had learned a hard lesson—sitting idly by while misguided politicians lose a war that the American people do not support is not an honorable option.<sup>22</sup>

Though Vietnam was far from over, when Republican Richard Nixon took office in 1969, things began looking up for the military. Despite Nixon's culture of secrecy, he made his intentions clear and, more importantly, asked military officers for their advice. The Nixon

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 152-160.

<sup>18</sup> McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 301.

<sup>19</sup> Herspring, *Pentagon and the Presidency*, 169-177.

<sup>20</sup> Weigley, "American Civil-Military Cultural Gap," 238-239.

<sup>21</sup> Hoffman, "Dereliction of Duty Redux?," 224.

<sup>22</sup> Herspring, *Pentagon and the Presidency*, 183.

administration's new direction in Vietnam included increased bombings, troop withdrawals, and "Vietnamization"—all focused on a quick ending to the war.<sup>23</sup> Though far from creating a harmonious relationship with the military, Nixon's "hawkish" policy centered on overwhelming force and quick resolution endeared him to countless military officers who had suffered under the Democrat Johnson.

Two decades later, those officers shaped by Vietnam were now running the military—and one of those in the American public who had opposed the war was now their Commander-in-Chief. Democratic President William Clinton's relationship with the military is another important dynamic that helps explain why the officer corps embraced the Republican Party during the last half of the twentieth century. Several factors led to a turbulent relationship between Clinton and his officers, the first being the aforementioned divergent Vietnam experiences. Like many others, Clinton avoided being drafted—even writing a letter to his University of Arkansas ROTC commander stating that he "loathed the military." As president, his initial body-language reinforced his anti-military image with gestures such as a half-hearted salute after taking over as Commander-in-Chief.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Clinton quickly instituted significant budget reductions, including halting pay increases. The military responded with outward hostility including public jokes and subtle snubs of protocol.<sup>25</sup> As an example, during an early first-term visit to the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt*, sailors provided "an undercurrent of mockery...Hillary jokes and Chelsea jokes." A career officer was quoted: "maybe we can call this his military service...three hours is more than he had before."<sup>26</sup> These initial troubles deepened in 1991 when Clinton energized his campaign promise to repeal the ban

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 186-209.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 335-337.

<sup>26</sup> Bacevich, "Clinton's Military Problem," 36.

on homosexuals serving in the military. Disregarding his most senior military leaders' advice to proceed more slowly, Clinton's aggressive approach to the volatile issue led to even more questioning of his leadership effectiveness.<sup>27</sup>

Foreign policy caused even more friction. Many officers saw as unforgiveable Clinton's liberal use of the military in multiple post-Cold War "non-wars" in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo while providing little policy oversight or direction.<sup>28</sup> Finally, Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinski further eroded the already disastrous relationship. The military saw a double standard—an officer's career could never survive such a scandal, yet their Commander-in-Chief's could. The president was simply not held to the same moral standards as those under him.<sup>29</sup> In sum, the military viewed the Democratic president as someone who avoided the call to duty, did not respect their profession or their advice, did not know how to employ force effectively around the globe, and clearly lacked the moral legitimacy to command them. The mere fact that Clinton was a Democrat made being a Republican appealing to the officer corps.

The military gravitation to the Republican Party was not just attributable to the personalities and policies of specific presidential administrations. In 2001, West Point professor Lance Betros explained how party platforms further cemented a conservative officer corps into the GOP. He argued that an alignment of conservative values in both social policy and national defense made military officers one of the nation's most Republican professional groups.<sup>30</sup> The Democratic Party, founded in the era of Andrew Jackson, was traditionally rooted in the "common man", eschewing the privileges of wealth and challenging the status quo. Since that

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 338-342.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 364-365.

<sup>30</sup> Betros, "Political Partisanship and the Military Ethic," 501.

time, the party has championed “the dispossessed and downtrodden” to include laborers, farmers, Catholics, Jews, immigrants, and, as a result of Roosevelt’s New Deal, African Americans. Oddly, from the Civil War into the 1960s, the Democratic constituency also included conservative, southern whites based largely on lingering hostility toward Abraham Lincoln’s Republican Party. Predictably, this mismatched coalition was not to last. In the 1960s, the Democrats embraced the civil rights movement, and with that, immediately began losing the support of conservative southerners—a demographic traditionally overrepresented in the officer corps.<sup>31</sup> This was reinforced when the Christian Right aligned with the Republican Party in the late 1970s. This movement, largely a reaction to Supreme Court decisions regarding school prayer and abortion, was led by television evangelists including Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. These leaders associated the judicial decisions with rising crime, divorce, drug use, pervasive sex and violence on television—and they blamed the disturbing trends on political liberalism.<sup>32</sup> The Religious Right’s conservative values already aligned cleanly with Huntington’s military ethic, so when they shifted to the Republican Party, they brought many military officers with them. In addition, when Republican President Ronald Reagan took office in 1980, he instituted massive military spending increases to counter the “Evil Empire” of the Soviet Union, and, unlike what took place in Vietnam, vowed to use the military “swiftly, massively, and decisively.” This further reinforced the long-term trend within the officer corps towards an allegiance to the GOP.<sup>33</sup>

Huntington and Janowitz saw it coming—the conservative officer corps had drifted from a more liberal civilian society. Huntington thought it was acceptable if handled smartly by

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<sup>31</sup> Desch, “Explaining the Gap,” 305.

<sup>32</sup> Reichley, “Faith in Politics,” 168-169.

<sup>33</sup> Betros, “Political Partisanship and the Military Ethic,” 508-510.

civilian leadership; Janowitz saw it as more dangerous and hoped the military could avoid it. What neither theorist predicted was a conservative officer corps now fully embracing a single political party.

Perhaps today's most outspoken scholar in the field of civil-military relations is University of North Carolina's Professor Richard H. Kohn, a former Air Force historian. In late 2008, a pessimistic Kohn lamented at what the incoming president would inherit: an exhausted military convinced that it would be *obliged* to push back against civilian leadership. He envisioned "well meaning, but profoundly mistaken" officers believing they must hold civilian leaders accountable for their mistakes—and using public forums to ensure the military was not blamed for political leadership's errors.<sup>34</sup>

Kohn lays out some specific challenges that will amplify civil-military tensions. The first is Iraq, where the American public's insistence on disengagement is driving the upcoming withdrawal and an uncertain Iraqi future. If a lack of American forces allows Iraq to drift back to violence, the finger pointing will begin. Republicans will blast the Democrats for surrendering—and the officer corps, spring-loaded to deflect the blame for failure, will join them. The budget is a second area of concern. Simply put, a continuously growing defense budget amidst an economic crisis is not realistic. Yet, a military fighting a war and facing rapidly deteriorating equipment will likely not curb its demanding appetite.<sup>35</sup> Given today's economic and political environment, cuts are likely inevitable. Debate over military spending will again take place along party lines—the Democrats slashing the defense budget, and Republicans and the officer corps kicking and screaming along the way. The third and perhaps

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<sup>34</sup> Kohn, "Coming Soon: A Crisis in Civil-Military Relations," 69-70.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.



most contentious fissure between the military and civilian leaders is social policy. Although controversial social issues such as religious proselytizing remain, the most contentious issue is openly gay uniformed service. Many feel that a change in policy is long overdue and that arguments about gays undermining discipline and unit cohesion are no longer credible. Kohn worries, however, that this will not be the case at more senior levels where the conservative values that Huntington and Janowitz spoke of are simply too difficult to overcome.<sup>36</sup> Once again, this will certainly align military leadership with the Republican Party against their Democratic civilian leadership. These potential friction points between a GOP-leaning officer corps and their Democratic civilian leadership are cause for great concern. The situation has the makings of a quiet, yet disastrous civil-military crisis where military advice is seen as politicized; and, in turn, loses credibility with civilian decision-makers. Put another way, a partisan officer corps risks becoming marginalized in a dangerous world that desperately needs it to be engaged, relevant—and heard.

In American society, civilian leaders and the general public, while engaged in the necessary partisan wrangling of the democratic process, trust their officer corps-led military to understand the fray, yet rise above it with smart advice, healthy dissent, and expert execution as ordered by civilian leaders—even when these orders run contrary to military wishes. If military advice or dissent is *even perceived* as partisan, it will be seen as less credible and often disregarded. For military leaders, *trust*—the very “lifeblood” of the civilian-military relationship—is their most valuable resource. This trust is the first casualty of politicization—this is the essence of the danger that looms.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>37</sup> Snyder, “Dissent and Strategic Leadership.”

## The Marshall Model<sup>38</sup>

Thankfully, history provides a crisis-tested path to guide a renewed norm for military officers. This norm, based on the example of General George C. Marshall's navigation of the world's greatest conflict, can steer today's military back to an appropriate, apolitical posture where sound advice and proper dissent once again have their place.

In *The Soldier and the State*, Huntington, referring to congressional budget issues in World War II, writes, "To achieve victory, Congress was willing to 'trust in God and General Marshall.' As one congressman remarked, 'The War Department, or ... General Marshall ... virtually dictated the budgets.'"<sup>39</sup> How was this possible? How could Marshall operate in such a politically charged environment, wield unprecedented power, and do so with unquestioned credibility? The answers to these questions illustrate Marshall's genius and provide a timeless model for today's officer corps.

Marshall set an important example even before he was promoted to Chief of Staff through his willingness to disagree with the president. In 1938, the United States was divided on how to react to the expansionism of Italy, Japan, and, in particular, Nazi Germany. A clear majority of Americans, fresh with the memories of World War I, felt the United States should steer clear of overseas wars. Congress, in fact, passed a series of neutrality acts to ensure it. Internationalists, on the other hand, felt that the nation's values and security required the United States to support Britain and France. Roosevelt sided with the internationalists, but could ill afford to alienate an isolationist Congress as he struggled to pass his New Deal agenda. The

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<sup>38</sup> The author conducted similar research and conclusions on General Marshall for an Air War College paper for Joint Strategic Leadership titled, "General George C. Marshall: The Model of Military Leadership," 17 Dec 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 325.

compromise FDR proposed was rearmament, particularly of aircraft, to begin a national mobilization.<sup>40</sup>

On November 14, 1938, Roosevelt gathered a cabinet-level meeting to articulate his massive aircraft procurement plan to protect the Western Hemisphere. The powerful president explained that he would ask Congress for 20,000 aircraft and instructed the War Department to begin preparations to operate a much larger fleet. Unfortunately, FDR was not interested in hearing what was needed to support and operate so many new aircraft. His plan built plenty of airplanes, but it was militarily unsound without procuring necessary infrastructure such as maintenance equipment and flight crews. Experts in the room knew the president's plan was unbalanced but politely agreed with it—until the new Deputy Army Chief of Staff, “way off to the side” of the room, Brigadier General George C. Marshall, famously spoke up: “Mr. President, I’m sorry, but I don’t agree with that at all.” The meeting quickly adjourned and most present assumed that would end Marshall’s brief time in FDR’s inner circle.<sup>41</sup> They, of course, were wrong. The wise FDR had found what he was looking for—a military officer who understood civil-military relations well enough to help him with the challenges that lay ahead. Marshall provided FDR immediate, blunt military advice, and just as importantly, he provided it in private. This set the tone. Later, Marshall’s frustrations would grow exponentially with some of Roosevelt’s policies, but the General had established that his opinion would be heard—and listened to.

The most frustrating political conundrum Marshall faced in his career involved the decision of how and when to engage against the Germans. Marshall and his planners favored

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<sup>40</sup> Stoler, *George C. Marshall: Soldier-Statesman*, 63-64.

<sup>41</sup> Parrish, *Roosevelt and Marshall: Partners in Politics*, 17-18.

Operation Sledgehammer, a plan that entailed a cross-channel invasion in late 1942.<sup>42</sup> This aggressive plan was designed to attack the Nazis head-on and address the Soviets' insistence for an immediate second front. Marshall garnered Roosevelt's approval rather easily; however, the British proved much less supportive. Churchill loathed taking such risk with his scarce men and materials and quietly pressed Roosevelt for the British preference, Operation Gymnast, a peripheral attack beginning in North Africa. The president sided with Churchill and ordered the Americans to accept Gymnast, later re-named Torch. Marshall had lost the most critical policy issue of the war and was completely humiliated.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, from this enormous defeat, Marshall learned lessons about grand strategy, alliances, and even politics in a democracy. It became clear that Roosevelt's decision calculus accounted for not just military strategy but also domestic politics. The president understood the public's thirst for a near-term military offensive and its importance in the 1942 mid-term congressional elections—he could ill afford to lose supporters in Congress while waiting for a later, albeit more militarily appealing, operation. The General also, as always, acknowledged the Commander-in-Chief as “an unquestioned superior officer”, respected his prerogative to dictate strategy, and carried out his orders dutifully ... and quietly.<sup>44</sup> It would pay off. Later, at the Trident conference in 1943, the Americans had agreed to continued Mediterranean offensives against Italy. Marshall agreed only with the condition that these offensives not affect a 1944 cross-channel invasion. Churchill, once again, disagreed with Marshall and pressed for more forces against the Italians—even if it meant delaying the invasion into France. Marshall faced yet another strategic defeat to the Prime Minister, but this time the General swayed FDR and won

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<sup>42</sup> An alternative, Operation Roundup, was also designed. It was similar, but would be executed in spring of 1943 with more divisions.

<sup>43</sup> Stoler, *George C. Marshall: Soldier-Statesman*, 96-100.

<sup>44</sup> Parrish, *Roosevelt and Marshall: Partners in Politics*, 296-297, 515.

support when the matter was finally resolved in Tehran. Through painful experience, Marshall had learned and mastered a key to the art of war—specifically, that strategy was inseparable from politics—both domestic and international. Even Churchill, a rarely matched political expert, was impressed. He commended the General he so often disagreed with as, “a statesmen with a penetrating and commanding view of the whole scene,” and by 1943 routinely began every Anglo-American conference by having dinner with him.<sup>45</sup>

The elegance of Marshall’s leadership in World War II is that while being in an inherently political job, he remained altogether *apolitical*—a posture he obsessively protected because, ironically, it was the bedrock of his tremendous political power. As case in point, Marshall famously refused to vote, and, when asked his political affiliation, he humorously dismissed the question by saying, “my father was a democrat, my mother a republican, and I am an Episcopalian.” His humor disappeared when the inevitable suggestions surfaced that he run for president. He saw such talk as not just distracting, but dangerous to his work, “Putting such an idea into a man’s head is the first step toward destroying his usefulness ... the public suggestion of such an idea, even by rumor or gossip, would be almost fatal to my interests.”<sup>46</sup> Even further, when Congress passed a bill in 1944 to create a new five-star rank for Marshall and Admiral Ernest King, the General objected. He loathed even a hint of any self-interest or being “ beholden to Congress for any rank of anything of that kind. I wanted to be able to go in there with my skirts clean and with no personal ambitions concerned in any way.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Stoler, *George C. Marshall: Soldier-Statesman*, 103-107.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 110. (Note: Over his objections, on December 15, 1944, Marshall was awarded a fifth star and became General of the Army.)

<sup>47</sup> Parrish, *Roosevelt and Marshall: Partners in Politics*, 137.

Besides ensuring clout within Roosevelt's inner-circle, this almost obsessive apolitical posture was the linchpin of Marshall's influence on Capitol Hill. Sam Rayburn, perhaps history's most powerful House Speaker commented, "Of all the men who ever testified before any committee on which I served, there is no one of them who has the influence...that General Marshall has...when he takes the stand, we forget whether we are Republicans or Democrats. We just remember that we are in the presence of a man who is telling the truth...." When Rayburn passed this praise to FDR, the president replied, "Sam, you don't admire General Marshall any more than I do. I'm not always able to approve his recommendations...but when I disapprove his recommendations, I don't have to look over my shoulder to see which way he's going, whether he's going back to the Capitol, to lobby against me, or whether he's going back to the War Department. I know he's going back to the War Department, to give me the most loyal support as chief of staff that any President could wish."<sup>48</sup>

When *Time* magazine named Marshall 1943's Man of the Year, it made some keen summarizations of the great military leader: "The Man who, more than any other could be said to have armed the Republic...Never in history has a military man enjoyed such respect on Capitol Hill...The secret is that American democracy is the stuff Marshall is made of...the U.S. people have learned why they trust General Marshall more than they have trusted any military man since George Washington: he is *civis Americanus*." *Time* concluded simply, "...this man is a trustee for the nation."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Time*, "U.S. at War," 18.

## Conclusion

Earlier, a fundamental question was posed: how does a society reconcile building a military strong enough to do anything elected leaders ask, but ensuring it is subordinate enough to do *only* what they ask? The answer, and the nucleus of civil-military relations, is *trust*. Society (and their elected leaders) must trust that military leaders will offer sound advice and dissent. Society must trust that both will be objective and credible. And, society must trust that, regardless of how military leaders feel about it, elected leaders' policy will be expertly executed by the military. Again, this is the core of the civil-military relationship. Within that essential, trusting relationship, Huntington worried that civilian leaders would fail to respect a conservative military, while Janowitz was concerned that the military would drift too far from mainstream society. In the end, both theorists made important observations, but both failed to foresee an even more dangerous manifestation of the rift they saw—the Republicanization of the officer corps. This partisan trend, born from a controversial war and seemingly routine domestic and ideological shifts over the past half-century, has nevertheless evolved to an extent that it threatens the trust so necessary for healthy civil-military relations in a democratic society.

Today, the military faces a daunting future: on-going wars, likely budget cuts, and imposed social policies—and in the midst of a Democrat-controlled executive and legislature. Without a doubt, the current international and domestic landscape presents massive challenges for today's military leaders, but challenges are nothing new. Before and during World War II, General Marshall also faced a seemingly insurmountable situation. Wisely, he knew the political power he would need to build and train the largest army in American history and then use it strategically around the globe would be unprecedented. He reasoned that the only way to amass the clout and credibility needed to influence political giants like Roosevelt, Churchill, and the US

Congress was to insulate himself *completely* from *any* political ideology. While being in an inherently political position, he could not be *non-political*, but he knew he must be absolutely *apolitical*. Establishing this transcendent trust with both politicians and the public was simply the only way his important advice, including his dissent, would be heard. He understood that eventually, if the civilians viewed military officers as a political threat, they would simply surround themselves with “yes-men,” and the military would, in essence, lose its voice.<sup>50</sup>

So what will today’s military leaders do? Will they succumb to their passion for their military plans and preferences above their sworn allegiance to the Constitution? Even with the purest of intentions, will they naively allow themselves to be politicized by politicians furthering a partisan agenda? Only time will tell how these questions will be answered, but we can easily predict how Marshall would have done it. With the myriad of challenges ahead, military officers would be wise to heed the General’s lesson to stay obsessively apolitical—as nothing less than the future of American civil-military relations hangs in the balance.

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<sup>50</sup> Feaver and Kohn, “Conclusion: The Gap and What It Means,” 469.



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